A Report from the South

First Hand Notes on the Human Flora and Fauna of Racially Tense Arkansas

I. F. Stone's Weekly

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Journal of A Flying Trip to Little Rock

We took the first plane out of Washington for Little Rock after hearing Chief Justice Warren read a tense and crowded court room the order that integration proceed. The plane's first stop was at Nashville, and passengers came aboard carrying its evening newspaper, the *Banner*. A black headline across page one indicated that we had reached the South. It said, with White Citizens Council objectivity, "Mix Now, Little Rock Told." On the editorial page, under the caption "Education Be Hanged!" there was a cartoon which pictured the Chief Justice as a burly man leaning arrogantly on a huge gavel. Behind him was a blackboard on which he had triumphantly crossed out the word "deliberate" in the phrase, "all deliberate speed," and written in the word "breakneck." A page one Associated Press bulletin claimed that a "jubilant" Mrs. Daisy Bates, local leader of the NAACP, had "hinted" that she expected "more mixing" soon, though I was later to learn that Mrs. Bates in Little Rock was harder to reach than the Secretary of State on Duck Island and twice as cautious and that any such "hint" must have been deduced by the AP man from the way she said, "no comment." A staff correspondent in Little Rock quoted the Rev. Wesley Pruden, the segregationist leader, as saying "The South will not accept this outrage, which a Communist dominated government is trying to lay on us." This was my introduction to a regional journalism which prints such statements matter-of-factly.

A Whiff of the Old Regime

We sat forward on one of four seats. Two of them, facing each other, were occupied by a gray-haired elderly white woman and a middle-aged colored woman who seemed to be travelling together. Though the former, from her accent, did not appear to be Southern, she turned out to be a gentlewoman returning from a summer in Massachusetts to her plantation home below Memphis with her Negro maid. When the maid, a sturdy woman, went to the rest room, the white lady told us her maid had been with her for 25 years and that she had given the maid a $2500 gift on the 25th anniversary of her coming to work for her. This was to illustrate her point that there were good relations in the South between the races. "There is real love between us," the white woman said of the Negroes who grew up on her plantation. She blamed the trouble in the South on "white riff-raff." She said her great grandfather had tried to free his slaves before "the war" but they pleaded with him that they would not know how to make their way in the world. (Later that evening in Little Rock I was to meet another woman who told me that her great grandfather had tried to free his slaves but that they begged him not to. I began almost to believe that in the slave-holding South no one was a slave-holder by choice but only out of devotion to the welfare of their black wards). Our gentlewoman friend told us how the "cream of the crop" on her plantation in her father's time and her husband's had been sent to college, and of the eminent positions they later reached in the Negro community. Though a Democrat, she had never once voted for Roosevelt of whom she obviously disapproved. She voted for Eisenhower twice, but no longer felt the same way about him. She spoke with gentle cynicism of the machine politicians and Senators she had known in Tennessee, as a well bred lady discussing rather vulgar retainers. She and the maid got off the plane in Memphis, leaving behind an authentic whiff of the old regime.

That Settles That

"Art. I, Sec. 1. Communism, being an ideology with its purpose to destroy the freedom and liberty of all people throughout the world, its major weapon being the fomentation of strife and disharmony calculated to turn class against class and race against race, thereby upsetting the time honored social patterns which have been attained in this country, not by prejudice but by a background of rich experience, all of which interferes with the exercise of rights reserved to the state; therefore, Communism is hereby declared to be against the public policy of the State of Arkansas."

—States Rights (Johnson) Amendment to the Arkansas State Const. to be voted on next November.

Like Any "Main St." Town

Below us, in the deepening dusk on leaving Memphis, was the dirty gray serpentine Mississippi. At Little Rock, in its modern new airport, flash-light bulbs popped as Virgil Blossom, the school superintendent, got off the plane ahead of us looking heavy and tired, and said a few non-committal words for the TV reporters. Little Rock, its main street lit up with green and red neon lights, its J. C. Penney Store and its big 5-and-10, seemed like any small mid-western city, except for the 'colored" sign in the rear as one passed the bus station. The one pleasantly different touch were the old-fashioned gas lamps on the streets, like those in Philadelphia a generation ago. On the way to the Sam Peck hotel, we caught a glimpse of the haberdashery run by the Syrian, Karam, so prominent behind the mob scenes last year. The bell-boy had that look of simulated imbecility Negroes often wear like a protective cloak in the South. The elevator was run by a cute Negro girl with a pert bottom, the kind plantation owners must have pinched.

A British newspaperman and myself were invited out that night to a party in a country home cluttered with heirlooms and good modern prints. Courtesy and political discretion forbid too close a description but after a night with a group

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An Evening With the Tortured Liberal Intellectuals of the South

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of tortured Southern liberals one acquired a new view of Tennessee Williams; he began to seem a camera-like realist. As with Negro intellectuals, all their talk came back obsessively and painfully to the race problem. These off-beat members of old families know their own political impotence and feel like aliens despite their family trees. Their self-deprecatory jokes are bitter; their talk often builds up to a kind of anguish. At moments they make one think of the 19th century Russian intelligentsia appalled at the abyss between them and the people. Many of the women at least take their Christianity with deep seriousness and are torn by guilt. They are appalled by the race hatred which spills over from apparently civilized people they have known all their lives. They are despairing over those who know better but say, "let it take its course," the "it" being the mob. They feel themselves a natural elite gone to seed, caught between the rabble (that's how most upper class Southerners think of common white people) and the rabble-rousers like Faubus whom they despise. Yet as the bourbon flows more freely their whole environment draws them into compulsive imitation; they begin to say "niggers" and "coons" with the obscene pleasure of an adolescent using dirty words. One goes to bed afterward, half seas over oneself, feeling that the Negro doesn't just live in the South, he haunts it.

Suspected of Being A Yankee

A liberal Little Rock newspaperman came to breakfast at the hotel next morning to give us a fill-in on the local situation. His most revealing remark, it seemed to me, came when I asked him what Negroes were thinking. "I just don't know," he said. The Little Rock story is covered almost entirely from the white side. In an effort to get the Negro side, I went to a white lawyer, Edward Dunaway, a Columbia graduate, who is head of the Urban League, which may seem stuffily respectable in the North but is regarded as downright radical in the South. "People ask me if I am a Yankee," Dunaway said with some bitterness. "One side of my family came here from Virginia in 1820 and the other from Kentucky in 1830." One of his grandfathers was Governor of Arkansas and Senator Joe Robinson was a cousin. Dunaway's father, also a lawyer, ran unsuccessfully for Congress on an anti-Ku Klux Klan platform in the 20's and defended Negroes condemned to death after the Elaine, Ark., race riots of 1919. These began when a deputy sheriff put in an appearance at the meeting of a union being formed by Negro sharecroppers. Several white men and more than 100 Negroes were killed; 87 Negroes were sentenced to jail and 12 to the electric chair. The latter were saved by a Supreme Court decision reversing their convictions. "I remember as a boy visiting the condemned with my father in the penitentiary," Dunaway related. "They had been put to work building and painting their own coffins. They showed us the black boxes and then sang hymns." It left a deep impression.

Dunaway made a date for us to talk later in the afternoon with a Negro doctor, and took us off for lunch to the Little Rock Club, a mausoleum like building which might have been taken for a large undertaking establishment. Part of the membership were in sports shirts without ties, the shirt tails worn over the pants, teen-age style. We sat around with a group having drinks, in a kind of neutral zone, the talk coming around only slowly to The Question. A visiting Texas reporter said Dallas, when ordered to integrate, would make Little Rock "look like a picnic." Another man said, "Well our whole problem might be summed up by saying that Orval Faubus just didn't want to go back to Huntsville, and if you've ever seen Huntsville it is hard to blame him." It was interesting to see the different ways in which members spoke to the Negro waiters. Some addressed the waiters with unostentatious politeness. There were others who ordered drinks with the cold look and lordly manner that seemed to reflect an idealized image of themselves as members of a superior race, disposing of vast acres and accustomed to handling *Nigra* servitors. As one watched these men, one thought "so this is the wine that goes to the white man's head in the South."

> **"If I could rest anywhere it would be in Arkansaw, where the men are of the real half-horse, half-alligator breed such as grow nowhere else on the face of the universal earth."**
>
> *—Davy Crockett, at a banquet given him by the citizens of Little Rock in 1834.*

An Eloquent Silence

We took a cab after lunch to Little Rock's Harlem along Ninth Street, a district of dingy bars, dilapidated stores and hand-me-down houses. My companion was a British reporter and we hoped the combination of his accent and mine would make it easier to get people to talk with us. But we drew a complete blank. A blind woman beggar said in a cultivated voice that she did not know what she could say that might not hurt her hereafter since she was on public assistance. "I will say this," she said, picking her words slowly, "everyone likes a good thing," meaning presumably better schools. Her son, also blind, also in a cultivated voice, said he was studying music. Further down the street we got a less friendly reception: "White man takes what you say and uses it against you." On a side street, alongside a long unpainted barn-like building which turned out to be the upper class dorm of Philander Smith College, a Negro Methodist school, there were a number of Negro boys playing ball. They wouldn't talk either. We went inside the college, which seemed more like a run-down old high school, and were told politely but firmly by the young woman who handles publicity that the college was keeping strictly "out of it" and that nobody would comment. "No, the students even among themselves do not discuss the question." One got the feeling of extraordinary restraint and discipline, as of a community which felt itself besieged. No one even used the word "school" or "segregation" or "integration." We also had the feeling of a new educated generation, not at all the "darkies" of white stereotypes. The silence as it piled up seemed more eloquent than anything which might have been said.

We did a little better with a white pawnbroker who said he had been there 20 years. He understood the silence which had greeted us. "People don't say anything," he told us. "They're polite and friendly but never discuss it." But Negroes had been buying guns and knives and laying them

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A Visit With A Young Negro Doctor in Apprehensive Little Rock

away. "You get arrested if you carry them on the street," he explained, "but if you wrap them up in paper and carry them home for self-protection it's legal." The only other white man we had seen in our walk around the neighborhood came in and turned out to be the manager of the local Negro movie. "Business usually falls off just before school opens," he told us. "But I've never seen anything as bad as this year. Ever since the court in St. Louis overruled Judge Lemley people have stopped coming out on the streets at night. They keep their children home." The pawnbroker said his business was bad, too. There was a lot of unemployment in the Negro section. "People don't have anything left to pawn." But the Negroes weren't the only one not talking. He owned six duplexes inhabited by whites and when he went around to collect the rent he found the same unwillingness to discuss schools or integration. "People on both sides just ain't talkin'." The pawnbroker summed up his own philosophy, "you gotta keep the nigger in his place or he'll run all over you." He had a permit and carried a gun. Even the Negro cops, as we had noticed, went on their patrols in pairs.

Wars and Rumors of Wars

We went into a white bar near the Negro section for a beer on our way back downtown. The place was crowded and we sat down at a table with two ducktail haircut characters, one handsome and friendly, the other with flattish face and slow of speech but anxious to talk. He asked my British friend whether rock-and-roll had reached England and when assured that it had, confessed to us one of the painful experiences of his life. Elvis Presley had once been in Little Rock before he became famous and our new friend had never gone to hear him! He told us this was the worst skidrow bar in town and recommended a better place uptown. He said he used to be a Methodist but was now a member of the Christian Church. He told us that about 20 years ago a Negro had assaulted a white girl and "they" had set him afire and dragged his burning body down Ninth Street and "they haven't forgotten." When we asked who he meant by "they," he said "the white folks" and repeated the story again, in the same melancholy tone. Then he told it a third time, as if it were a portent of things to come. What did he think of school integration, we ventured to ask. "It's coming," he said, shaking his head. "It'll be here in about 10 years, and then as the Bible says, 'there will be wars, and rumors of wars' and war between the nations and the races." He did not speak with hatred but with a kind of dispassionate fatalism. He shook hands as we left, but his friend looked on coldly, as if he weren't going to be taken in by any furriners.

A Better Negro Neighborhood

The Negro neighborhood to which we went for our appointment with the doctor was quite different from Little Rock's Harlem. He lived in a modest but well-painted frame house, set on a wide lawn. The homes and yards all looked well cared for. A Negro neighbor was cutting his grass nearby, and there was a scamper of feet and a burst of giggles within when we rang the bell. Two sets of pigtails with hair-ribbons ran into the rear of the house when the doctor's wife, a tall, handsome dark woman, opened the door. She asked us to sit down in the parlor and said her husband would be home in a few minutes. There was a piano and a high-fi set in the living room. She said her oldest boy who had just graduated from junior high was one of the new applicants for Central High. "My husband and I tried to dissuade him. We told him it would mean giving up his saxophone." Apparently the school band at Central High is not integrated. "But he insisted." The boy himself came in before going out to serve his paper route. He was a slim, shy, gangling youth. Why did he want to go to Central High. "The science facilities there are better and I want to be a doctor. I'd get a better education and I'd be paving the way for others." (It is a strange world and time in which the future of a race depends on the pioneering courage and steadiness of its children).

Racists Go to Negro Doctors

The doctor, when he arrived, turned out to be a pleasant young man, conforming neither to Negro or Southern stereotypes. We asked what was the feeling in the Negro community. "I can only speak for myself," he replied. "We feel apprehensive but hopeful. We hope everybody will come to their senses." He smiled when we told him of the silence which had greeted us in Little Rock's Harlem. "That's not exactly new," he said, "Even at the best there was never much communication between us." We asked whether any of his patients were white. He said about 20 percent. He said there were Negro dentists in the plantation country whose practice was 85 percent white. Were any of his white patients segregationists? He supposed most of them were, but that didn't make any difference when it came to choosing a doctor. There were six Negro doctors and about 100 white in Little Rock and both sides had a racially mixed practice. The Medical Society had been integrated for five or six years and there had been Negro students in the Little Rock medical school since 1948. "The doctors meet together but not the wives," his wife interjected. Both said it was impossible to find any consistency in racial patterns. "In a store downtown," the wife said. "I will be standing near a white woman and she will talk to me pleasantly and long. But a few minutes later when I see here again outside at the bus stop where she is with white friends, she will look straight through me." She said there were no facilities in the stores for Negro shoppers, no rest rooms, no place to get a bite to eat.

The Guilty and the Christian

Were there interracial groups in Little Rock? There was the Arkansas Council on Human Relations, a Thursday morning mixed prayer group, a Fellowship of Reconciliation chapter, a Bahia group, all small. All met at a Negro community center or in a Negro church. The previous Thursday, the day the Supreme Court heard final argument on the school case, there was an 18-hour mixed prayer vigil in a Negro Methodist Church, beginning at 6 a. m. and ending at midnight. (Later another reporter told me that a camera man outside the prayer meeting asked a white minister going in, "Are you a nigger lover?" The minister replied, "I love God. God

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An Old Negro Farm Lady Only Person Who Asked About War in China

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loves niggers. I guess that makes me a nigger lover, too." "Will you repeat that for the camera," said the camera man). "Why do white people here come to inter-racial groups?" I asked the doctor. "Some have a guilt complex I suppose," he answered. "They feel they and their forebears haven't treated Negroes right. Others just have deeply Christian feelings and want some way to express them."

Where Yankees Bombed A Hospital

On Sunday, with two British correspondents, I drove down to the delta country. Arkansas is half southern, half western. The mountainous country north and west of Little Rock has few Negroes; the people and the mentality of the area is more like Oklahoma and mountain Missouri. South and east of Little Rock is black country, "delta" in the sense that it gets an overflow from the Mississippi and from its tributary White and Arkansas rivers. The land and the mentality here is southern, much like that of neighboring Mississippi and Louisiana. We decided to visit Helena, the State's only "seaport," a river town of which Mark Twain wrote in his *Life on the Mississippi.* The Negro boy who brought the rented car to the hotel for the trip and drove me back to the car rental office was friendly and said he came from that area. He followed us into the office to show us the best way to get there and the manager found him there marking the map with me. "Mandy Lee," he said, "You're getting out of your place when you come into this office." I explained it was all my fault and Mandy Lee stood aside, with a properly contrite expression. "Now, my friend," said the manager. "You're going down to nigger country. This is where they raise rice and cotton and niggers." He showed me the points of interest I would pass. "Right here," he said, "A Yankee gunboat came up the river and shelled a Confederate hospital." I thanked him and left thinking of the wondrous way in which all enemies in all wars always manage with unerring aim to hit hospitals.

"Work Like Oxes"

Helena is about 150 miles southeast of Little Rock. The country is flat and not too interesting. We passed two Negro baptismals on the way; the women in bright Sunday clothes; many cars parked nearby, and some brother in a white gown being dipped in the water. We thought it would be rude to stop and watch, that a white man's presence would be disturbing and resented. But we did after several attempts and suspicious greetings manage to talk with one old Negro farm couple on their ramshackle porch with chickens running about in the yard. The old man said he had farmed there for 68 years and the white folks thereabouts had always treated him right "and with respect." He had no complaint, the price of cotton was good but the price of victuals went up with it. "We work like oxes," said the fierce looking old lady, his wife. Shrewd eyes looked out of her worn black African face. Their children were gone to St. Louis and Chicago, all except one daughter who sat there shyly reading in a hymn book. Good manners and journalism struggled but the latter won when we asked whether we might see the inside of their house. "It's just a poor man's house," the old man objected with dignity. "There's a sick person in there." We apologized. The old lady said, "Are things going to get better for black folks?" and later, "I hope we're not going to have a war over there in China." It turned out that she was the only person, black or white, who asked us about the Far Eastern crisis in our three days in Arkansas.

(*To Be Concluded Next Week*)

Secession from U.S.—and the UN?

"Art I, Sec. 7. It shall be the duty of the [States Rights] Commission . . . to perform any and all acts and things deemed necessary and proper to protect the sovereignty of the State of Arkansas and her sister states from encroachment thereon by the Government of the United States, or by any . . . federation of nations . . . and to resist the usurpation of the rights and the powers reserved to this State or her sister states by such governments, branches, departments or agencies."

—States Rights (Johnson) Amendment to the Arkansas State Const. to be voted on next November.

Portraits of Gov. Faubus and Federal Judge Miller in Our Next Week's Installment

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